



UN OFFICE FOR  
DISASTER RISK  
REDUCTION

**DISASTER**

**DISPLACEMENT**

2020



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impact of climate change and disasters on human mobility is one of the most pressing humanitarian and development challenges of the 21st century.

Between 2008 and 2018, an average of 24 million people were forced from their homes by disasters each year - three times the number of people displaced by conflict and violence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 'Global Report on Internal Displacement 2018.'



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The socio-economic impacts of disaster displacement can be devastating. When people have to leave their homes, they become increasingly vulnerable on many levels and are often exposed to higher levels of risk. In some situations, they may face secondary or protracted displacement, unable to return home for months or years.

UNDRR is committed to working with States and other actors to ensure that the scope, nature and magnitude of disaster displacement is fully understood and that national and local Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies and plans are developed which reduce current risk and prevent new risks associated with disaster displacement from arising.

# THE CONTEXT

Disaster displacement involves forced or involuntary movements that may occur within a country or across international borders. It is commonly associated with conflict, but also applies to forced movements triggered by natural or human-made hazards which can be sudden-onset events such as storms, floods or earthquakes or slow-onset phenomena such as drought and sea-level rise.

People who flee within their own countries are called internally displaced people (IDPs) while cross-border disaster displacement refers to forced movements between countries. Most disaster displacement is short term, following organised emergency evacuations. But in some instances people may face protracted displacement where they may be unable to return home or re-establish their lives and livelihoods for an extended period of time.

In 2018, approximately 1,600 disaster events were recorded<sup>2</sup> globally which displaced 17.2 million people. Weather-related disasters such as floods and storms, accounted for 90 per cent of all disaster displacement, with geophysical disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis accounting for the remainder. Small-scale events are the main drivers of displacement yet they mostly go unreported and tend to occur in isolated, insecure or marginalised areas.

The increasing impacts of climate change and the growing concentration of populations in areas exposed to storms and floods of growing intensity and frequency, mean that ever more people are at risk of being displaced.

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<sup>2</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 'Global Report on Internal Displacement 2018.'

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***Without concrete climate and development action, just over 143 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America –or around 2.8 percent of the population of these three regions–could be forced to move within their own countries to escape the slow-onset impacts of climate change.<sup>3</sup>***

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<sup>3</sup> Groundswell: Preparing for internal climate migration, World Bank 2018

*In war-torn countries such as Syria, Yemen and Somalia – recognized as some of the world's most severe humanitarian crises - drought, poverty and discontent, have been key factors in fueling population movements.*

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In the past decade, disasters have uprooted about 265 million people, more than three times the number forced to leave their homes as a consequence of conflict and violence. Recent research shows that rising temperatures and a growing number of weather-related disasters cause higher levels of migration compared with the number of people migrating for economic and political reasons.

Displacement is often a result of many interconnected drivers. Unsustainable economic growth and development practices accelerate climate change and environmental degradation, which in turn may reduce crop yields and access to natural resources, increasing conflict over water, land and other resources, and eventually forcing people from their land and communities.

Conflict, climate change and disaster risk are closely intertwined. In some of the world's most exposed regions, weak institutions, a lack of financial resources and environmental degradation, often combine with other fragilities to create the conditions for political instability, civil unrest, conflict and ultimately situations where people leave their homes in search of a better life.

# THE CHALLENGES

Fleeing one's home to escape the impact of a hazard can mean the difference between life and death and often results in an uncertain future with severe and long-lasting social, economic, administrative and legal consequences. The immediate impact of a disaster can be traumatic, including death or injury of loved ones, damage to a home or the loss of a livelihood.

Displacement, particularly in low income developing countries, can worsen pre-existing vulnerabilities. It disrupts family, community and cultural life and erodes the cohesion and resilience of communities. The loss of a livelihood creates unemployment and often a downward spiral into debt, mental health problems, and poverty. Access to education, healthcare, basic services and amenities can be disrupted and displaced people may be unable to receive

Government assistance, or obtain a work permit. Displacement can also create safety and security concerns, particularly amongst the vulnerable and marginalised. Women and children may be at a heightened risk of sexual violence and trafficking.

Most people displaced following a disaster take refuge with host families or in rented accommodation, rather than in communal shelters or camps. Depending on the severity of the hazard and their capacity to recover, it may be months or even years before people can return home safely and sustainably. In some cases, return may never be possible and long-term solutions must be found that support the dignified voluntary settlement of displaced people, addressing their needs and vulnerabilities.

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*Four months after back to back cyclones struck Mozambique in the Spring of 2019, more than half a million people remained in either in resettlement camps or living in the ruins of their homes. Four years after the 2015 Nepal earthquake, over a million people are still waiting to be adequately rehoused.*



UNDRR/Duncan Lukoye/2019

Internal displacement can have devastating economic impacts, affecting the lives of displaced people and society as a whole. People's ability to earn a living and contribute to the economy, and the negative effects on economic development at a national level, can be far-reaching.

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*Haiti is amongst the poorest countries in the world where disasters, forced evictions, chronic food and livelihood insecurity, and economic, political and environmental fragility drive high levels of severe and protracted displacement. Following the 2010 Haiti earthquake which displaced 2.1 million people, the total economic impact of this crisis was estimated at US\$1.4 billion for the period from 2010 to 2017, corresponding to an annual average of 2.6 per cent of Haiti's 2009 GDP.<sup>4</sup> More than half of the total cost results from impacts on housing and infrastructure, including the provision of emergency and transitional shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene services to IDPs.*

*The earthquake that struck the Nepalese region of Gorkha in April 2015 killed nearly 9,000 people, destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes across the country and left more than 2.6 million people were displaced. In addition to the human suffering it caused, the magnitude 7.8 quake had an immediate economic impact estimated at as much as half of Nepal's US\$20 billion GDP. The cost of IDPs' lost productivity was around US\$406 million.<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> Unveiling the cost of internal displacement. IDMC 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Lost productivity due to internal displacement, the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, The ripple effect: economic impacts of internal displacement, IDMC June 2018

# DISASTER DISPLACEMENT AND UNDRR

UNDRR works with governments to ensure that they report on progress to achieve the targets of the Sendai Framework. This includes improving understanding of the magnitude of disaster displacement globally by adopting or developing systems that collect, analyse and share data on displacement. This ensures that risk can be understood in all its dimensions, taking into account those with specific needs and vulnerabilities - women, older people, people with disabilities and indigenous and marginalised groups.

Data collected on disaster displacement is vital to decision-makers. It can inform risk and impact assessments, early warning systems, preparedness and response plans, and a wide range of plans linked to climate change, DRR and development. Specifically - countries are encouraged to share data on the number of people whose homes were destroyed by disasters, and the percentage of the population protected from disasters by pre-emptive evacuations.

*Indonesia is made up of more than 17,000 islands, all prone to disasters. It has a large and dense population, which means many people live in highly exposed areas, and low economic development in some parts of the country, which leads to poor coping capacity, means the country is also highly vulnerable to disasters.*

*These factors combine to give Indonesia some of the highest levels of disaster displacement worldwide. The National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) collects data systematically based on the DesInventar mechanism and is the main source of information on disaster displacement in the country.*

*BNPB reports on displacement figures through press releases, infographics and other communication products, and maintains an online data repository. The repository is updated regularly with information on where and when disasters take place, the type of hazards that trigger them and the number of people killed, missing, injured and displaced or evacuated. It also contains information on housing damage, including whether the damage is light, partial or severe.*

*Having this kind of information available, regularly updated and easily accessible online is invaluable for monitoring organisations and those developing policies and recommendations that save lives.*

***In Fiji,  
a number of communities have decided  
to relocate to avoid the impacts of climate  
change and environmental degradation and  
the Government has developed guidelines to  
support them in planning their own relocation  
process. The guide includes a wide range of  
topics including assessing whether relocation  
is necessary, identifying an appropriate site  
and consultation mechanisms.***

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As an advisory group member in the Platform for Disaster Displacement, UNDRR published the Words into Action guide, 'Disaster Displacement: How to Reduce Risk, Address Impacts and Strengthen Resilience'. The guide is aimed at helping governments, policymakers and other disaster management actors with practical approaches to integrate disaster displacement in national DRR strategies, plans and legislative frameworks. The guide was developed with a range of partners including the Norwegian refugee Council, the Platform on Disaster Displacement, UNHCR, IOM and The Government of Germany.

In August 2019, UNDRR's Asia Pacific office, working with IOM, launched a working group with 16 UN organizations, research institutes, civil society organizations and intergovernmental organizations, to address disaster displacement. The working group focuses on supporting States to integrate displacement in all aspects of development planning and disaster risk management. It also works to strengthen coordination of activities related to internal and cross-border displacement risks in the context of disasters.

UNDRR has issued a grant to the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to prepare a briefing paper on the topic of disaster displacement in Asia Pacific, with a view to focusing decision-makers attention on new and current complex realities of protracted and multiple disaster displacements. The paper will act as an input for a session on displacement at the Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR) in June 2020.

UNDRR works at global, regional and national levels through different forums and mechanisms to strengthen its engagement with partners around disaster displacement. This includes promoting transboundary cooperation towards reducing displacement risk - working closely with partners to integrate DRR in the Global Compact for Migration which aims to minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin.

*In Pakistan, the high mountain community of Ghulkin in Gilgit-Baltistan has already relocated in response to climate change. Its members identified a safe site outside their village through a consultative and participatory process after humanitarian agencies informed them about the increasing risk of a glacial lake outburst flood. NGOs conducted hazard assessments and mapping, and developed a land-use plan for the new site, and the local Government has built roads, schools and irrigation infrastructure.*

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## DISASTER DISPLACEMENT AND THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK

The Sendai Framework provides the foundation, targets and guiding principles for states to develop a range of national and local laws, strategies and policies that include provisions to prevent and reduce the risks associated with disaster displacement.

The guiding principles of the Sendai Framework highlight the importance of an 'all of society' approach to DRR based on partnership amongst a wide array of stakeholders including civil society organisations, at-risk communities and refugees, asylum seekers or Internally displaced people. The Sendai Framework emphasises the need for strong DRR coordination structures which share knowledge and information, promote best practise and learning and improve preparedness and response planning around disaster displacement.

The Sendai Framework identifies a range of activities to reduce, prepare for and ensuring rapid and effective response to disasters and related displacement via measures such as evacuation drills, training and area-based support systems.

Disasters hit the poorest hardest and the world's most at-risk populations reside predominantly in less developed countries or small island states. The Sendai Framework and the 2013 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) acknowledge DRR as a cornerstone of sustainable development where development assistance should be directed at addressing vulnerabilities and reaching those left furthest behind, this includes people displaced by disasters.

Investments in DRR that reduce the risks of displacement and build community resilience are vital to avoid the negative social and economic consequences of protracted displacement in low and middle-income countries and to help them to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.



# KEY MESSAGES

- The impacts of climate change and disasters on human mobility is one of the most significant humanitarian and development challenges the world faces in the 21st century
- Climate change is a key driver of disaster displacement and is reducing the capacity of low and middle-income countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and keeping global temperature well below 2°C is the greatest long-term contribution that governments and the private sector can make to disaster risk reduction and disaster displacement
- DRR is important in promoting peace and stability where the climate emergency and other factors are fuelling tensions, conflict and displacement in fragile states
- Effective DRR plans play a vital role in reducing the risk and impacts of disaster displacement and building the resilience of at-risk groups.
- Humanitarian action and development assistance should be mutually reinforcing and reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience amongst displaced populations.
- UNDRR is committed to working with disaster risk management actors and policymakers from the local to global level to translate the Sendai Framework on disaster displacement risk into effective action
- To reduce disaster displacement, we must avoid putting people's in harm's way in the first place. Development must be risk informed.

# KEY FACTS

- Globally, over **70 MILLION PEOPLE** are displaced by conflict, violence, disasters and human rights violations. This is the highest level of forced displacement since World War II.
- In 2018, there were **17.2 MILLION** new disaster displacements globally.
- Humanitarian crises are affecting more people for longer: number of people targeted by UN to receive humanitarian assistance increased from 77 million in 2014 to **101 MILLION IN 2018**.
- **EXTREME WEATHER** events account for **90 PER CENT** of major disaster events and their number has doubled over the last twenty years as the climate crisis worsens.<sup>6</sup>
- **RECORDS FOR THE HOTTEST YEAR ON RECORD ARE BEING BROKEN EVERY TWELVE MONTHS**.
- 58 per cent of deaths from natural disasters occur in the top **30 MOST FRAGILE STATES**.<sup>7</sup>
- In the past 100 years, 58 tsunamis have claimed more than 260,000 lives, or an average of **4,600 PER DISASTER**, surpassing any other natural hazard.<sup>8</sup>
- The World Bank estimates that the global economy loses **US\$520 BILLION EVERY YEAR** because of natural hazards and 26 million people are pushed into poverty.
- More than **80 PER CENT** of all new displacements between 2008 and 2018, or around 187 million, occurred in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>9</sup>
- Unless urgent climate and development action is taken, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America could be dealing with a combined total of over **140 MILLION INTERNAL CLIMATE MIGRANTS BY 2050**.<sup>10</sup>
- By 2050, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance as a result of storms, droughts and floods could climb beyond **200 MILLION** annually – compared to an estimated 108 million today.<sup>11</sup>
- The economic impact of internal displacement associated with typhoon Haiyan in which over **1 MILLION** homes were damaged or destroyed was \$816 million for the first six months after the disaster.<sup>12</sup>
- By 2050, the world is expected to add **2.5 BILLION PEOPLE** to urban areas, with close to 90% of this increase taking place in Asia and Africa.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> COHAFA presentation – UNDRR Director, 5 September, 2019

<sup>7</sup> Disaster Risk Reduction in Conflict Contexts, ODI May 2019

<sup>8</sup> [www.unisdr.org/2016/tsunamiday/](http://www.unisdr.org/2016/tsunamiday/)

<sup>9</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 'Global Report on Internal Displacement 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Groundswell: Preparing for internal climate migration, World Bank 2018

<sup>11</sup> The cost of doing nothing, IFRC, 2019

<sup>12</sup> Unveiling the cost of internal displacement. IDMC 2019.

<sup>13</sup> 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects, UNDESA, 2018